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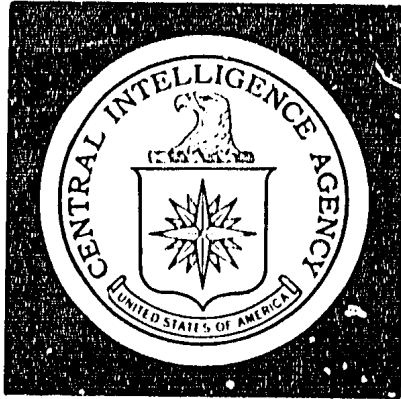
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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

# Intelligence Memorandum

*The 1971 South Korean Presidential Election*

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY  
Directorate of Intelligence  
9 December 1970

## INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The 1971 South Korean Presidential ElectionIntroduction

Next spring's presidential election in South Korea promises to be a much livelier affair than originally anticipated. When incumbent President Pak Chong-hui last year won the controversial referendum for changing the constitution to permit him to seek a third successive term, the actual election process seemed likely to be anticlimactic. The major opposition group, the New Democratic Party, was in disarray after spending its limited financial and human resources in a bootless effort to block the referendum. From the ruins, however, has emerged a highly attractive contender for the presidency in the person of Kim Tae-chung, a young national assemblyman with the talent and temerity to attack the government on issues that hurt.

Kim has been drawing large and responsive audiences in an energetic stumping tour of the provinces. His message is clear: he does not deny President Pak's achievements but argues that a change is needed to overcome the political, economic, and social injustices that continue to afflict the country. The matter of US troop reductions is not likely to be injected as a real issue in the campaign for a variety of reasons, but mainly because the views of the two parties on national security and foreign policy correspond rather closely.

*Note: This memorandum was produced solely by CIA. It was prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence and coordinated with the Office of National Estimates and the Office of Economic Research.*

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President Pak, given his impressive record and all the resources at his disposal, is still considered an odds-on favorite to win, but he seems far from complacent. At this stage, there is no compelling reason to believe that the election will be anything but orderly, but if either Pak or his nervous political lieutenants become further unstrung or goaded by Kim's barbs, there is the danger of a government overreaction that could disrupt the country's stability and tarnish its image abroad.

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The Opposition Candidate\*

1. The New Democrats, South Korea's only significant opposition party, have confounded the government by nominating a credible candidate to run against incumbent Pak Chong-hui in next year's presidential election. Kim Tae-chung, a respected 45-year-old political moderate with a reputation as an effective politician who wins, is a long-time member of the National Assembly and a former leader of the now defunct political party that was ousted by Pak in the 1961 military coup. His "democratic" credentials are impeccable. Furthermore, in capturing the New Democratic nomination, Kim had to overcome an older leadership, whose grip on the party was generally regarded as subsidized by the government. His victory thus has had a certain David and Goliath air to it that has given rise to new hopes among segments of the population that it may yet be possible to prevail against entrenched power.

2. Kim's candidacy will appeal most strongly to those reform-minded minority elements--students, intellectuals, and some members of the country's new middle class--that are most critical of government corruption and authoritarianism. A forceful orator, he has attracted large and enthusiastic crowds in Seoul and other major cities. His aim seems to be to get his message across to the greatest number of voters early in the campaign, then to lower his profile until the legally designated 40-day campaign period immediately preceding the election, which probably will be called for May. In the meantime, he can continue to snipe at the administration while gauging which issues to bear down on during the critical closing weeks of the campaign.

3. Kim's basic theme is simple. He does not deny Pak's achievements, but he holds that change is needed to overcome the political, economic, and social injustices that continue to afflict the country. Within these limits he has not hesitated to challenge Pak

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on a variety of potentially explosive issues. He has suggested that South Korea's security should eventually be jointly ensured by the US, USSR, Japan, and Communist China. Taking his cue from Pak's recent "peaceful unification" speech, he has called for the exchange of mail, athletes, and newsmen with the North whenever Pyongyang renounces the use of force against the South. He has also been doing his best to get Pak over the barrel for his continued failure to implement the constitution's provision for local self-government and for not cracking down on wide-scale favoritism within the national militia--an institution that affects virtually every South Korean family. In addition, Kim has raised a variety of less sensitive but nonetheless compelling issues, including women's rights and tax reform.

#### Kim Faces Heavy Odds

4. Despite the widespread favorable reaction to Kim's opening campaign broadsides, his prospects for victory next May appear at this time to be marginal at best. In comparison to Pak's Democratic-Republican party, the conservative New Democrats are poorly organized and short of money. Moreover, Kim can not count on even the unswerving support of all his party. Although the New Democratic leadership, sensing a possible winner, has initially rallied behind his candidacy, severe infighting is the general rule within the party. There are already indications that all Kim's powers of leadership will be needed if he is to keep everyone in step with him until election day.

5. Opposition elements outside the New Democratic party also threaten to cut into his vote. The most notable of these is led by former president Yun Po-son, who was the principal opposition candidate against Pak in the past two elections. Yun has denied that he intends to run again in 1971, but he has also stated that his group will field a candidate. Anyone put forward by Yun, including himself, would probably be offered under-the-table financial support by the administration, which has a record of backing splinter

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candidates in order to divide the opposition vote. Another likely recipient of administration funds, if he chooses to run, is Masses Party chairman and perennial candidate So Min-ho. So, like Kim, is a National Assemblyman from the relatively neglected Cholla provinces, a traditional opposition stronghold. So's candidacy could hurt Kim in an area where he otherwise might expect strong support.

6. The biggest hurdle standing between Kim and the presidency, however, is Pak and the government apparatus. Many among the crowds who apparently relish hearing the administration criticized are likely on election day to have second thoughts about substituting Kim's untested abilities for the security Pak has demonstrated he can provide. Pak is generally given credit for the country's impressive economic progress, recent political and social stability, and growing international prestige. These successes have won him widespread public acceptance as a national leader. In what were generally free elections, Pak's share of the popular vote increased from only 46.6 percent in the 1963 presidential race to almost 52 percent in the 1967 contest. Moreover, a substantial 65.1 percent of the electorate approved the 1969 constitutional referendum that enabled him to seek a third term in 1971. Additionally, the levers of power are presently concentrated as never before in Pak's hands, and he has working for him a government bureaucracy well versed in delivering the votes to the party in power. This can be an overwhelming advantage in a country where the majority of citizens still live in rural areas and the local policeman traditionally serves as the arbiter between the individual villager and an all-powerful central government.

#### Skeletons in the Government's Closet

7. Pak is nevertheless vulnerable on a number of issues that could erode his popular support between now and the election. Corruption in high places is massive and probably better organized than at any time before, even though Pak's reputation for hard work and



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personal honesty affords him a degree of immunity from charges against his administration. The enormous economic growth of necessity has created obvious income disparities. Affluence among the few has grown faster than improvement in the common man's standard of living. Some rural areas, especially, have continued to lag in development. Finally, there is an undercurrent of public resentment over government controls and restraints, including those which limit free expression in the press and other media.

8. These drawbacks do not now seem insurmountable, however. The recent announcement of government plans for a new rice price policy, regional dispersal of industry, a Seoul subway system, and two major development projects reflects administration awareness of public sensitivity to economic issues in an election year. Also, the administration has reacted quickly to undercut Kim's proposal to reorganize the controversial national militia system. While strongly condemning Kim's plan, the minister of defense has announced extensive reforms designed to correct the abuses pointed up by the opposition candidate. If the promised reforms are implemented in the coming months, the militia could be largely removed as an active campaign issue.

#### Impact of US Troop Reductions on the Election

9. The issue of US troop reductions in Korea appears likely to have only a marginal impact on the election. Pak had opened himself to the charge that he created undue strains in relations with the Americans by his initial strong stand that any cutback of US troops in Korea at this time would be tantamount to inviting Pyongyang to resume open hostilities. The emotional impact of this issue has by now largely dissipated, however, and the talks on modernizing South Korea's forces have helped to recreate an atmosphere of mutual consent. Nor can Kim, who has been accusing Pak of exaggerating the threat from the North to justify his seeking a third term, effectively use the counter argument that Pak has been weak in dealing with the US

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on the troop issue, thereby impairing South Korea's security. Furthermore, Kim cannot make too much of an issue of US troop reductions without the risk of offending the nation's 625,000-man military establishment.

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For Kim to insist otherwise would at the very least imply criticism of the country's armed forces, and could expose him to charges of giving aid and comfort to the enemy.

10. Although many Koreans are deeply concerned over the prospect of reduced US involvement in Asia and what this could mean for Korea, there is reason to believe that the government has exaggerated the extent of public alarm over US troop reduction per se. When the US announced the reduction, Pak sought to orchestrate a sharp public reaction in the press and other public media as a lever to help extract the maximum price for his cooperation. But polls in the rural areas during the weeks and months following the US announcement revealed almost complete disinterest in the subject. Those who expressed opinions were principally worried about any financial loss they might experience as a result of US force reduction. Finally, the announcement that the US intends to provide \$1.5 billion over the next five years to modernize South Korea's forces presumably will help alleviate whatever concern there is among the population at large that the country's defenses are being impaired.

#### Election Atmospherics

11. There is presently no compelling reason to expect that the election will be carried out in other than an orderly and peaceful manner, although minor incidents are likely. The North Koreans will attempt to exploit the rising campaign fever as election time comes closer, but what Pyongyang does will probably be restricted by a realization that any major action

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[redacted]

on its part would be likely only to rally the nation more closely behind Pak. There have recently been new stirrings among South Korea's students, another possible source of trouble. Recent on-campus demonstrations at leading universities in Seoul, although undertaken ostensibly for other reasons, appear to have been intended to show student displeasure over official surveillance of their activities and student determination not to be intimidated. The authorities, however, are alert to the possibility of disturbances by the students and are prepared to hold them in check.

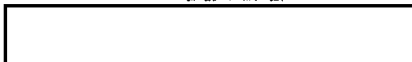
12. The greatest potential for disruption is that the administration will overreact to Kim's vigorous campaign challenge, thereby generating public resentment and weakening the political stability that Pak has built up over the years. As things now stand, Pak is generally conceded to be a shoo-in. But when he changed the constitution last year to permit himself to run for a third term, he relinquished an historic opportunity to preside over South Korea's first peaceful transfer of power. Thus it is not enough for Pak merely to win the election; he feels he must win big so that there can be no doubt about the correctness of his actions. Pak is a proud military man [redacted] who finds it difficult to brook opposition. This trait is reinforced by a Confucian heritage that tends to equate the holding of public office with personal righteousness. Any political criticism is by extension a reflection on the honor and integrity of the office holder. [redacted]

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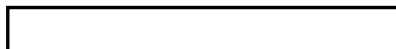
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14. Such government activities, while still mild by traditional Korean election standards, could in the heat of the coming campaign expand to blatant rigging of the election or a brutish intimidation of the electorate reminiscent of the Rhee regime. Pak is sensitive to his place in Korean history, however, and, despite his flashes of temper, is anxious to project an image far different from that of Rhee in his later days. It is likely therefore that the administration will continue to rely on such tested tactics as massive spending of public monies and the more subtle forms of bureaucratic persuasion that were the rule in the last two presidential contests.



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